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ABSTRACT

North Carolina's educational reform effort is composed of three related programs--the Basic Education Program (BEP), the School Improvement and Accountability Act (Senate Bill 2), and a new system of state accreditation. Information about the complementary and interdependent connection among the three programs is provided in this publication. The BEP establishes state curriculum standards and guidelines for resource allocation. Accreditation is a mandatory process of measuring outcomes of the BEP, involving two types of standards: performance and opportunity. Senate Bill 2 gives local teachers and administrators decision-making authority over resource utilization, increasing local control but also increasing accountability. Answers to specific questions are provided in the last section. One figure is included. (LMI)

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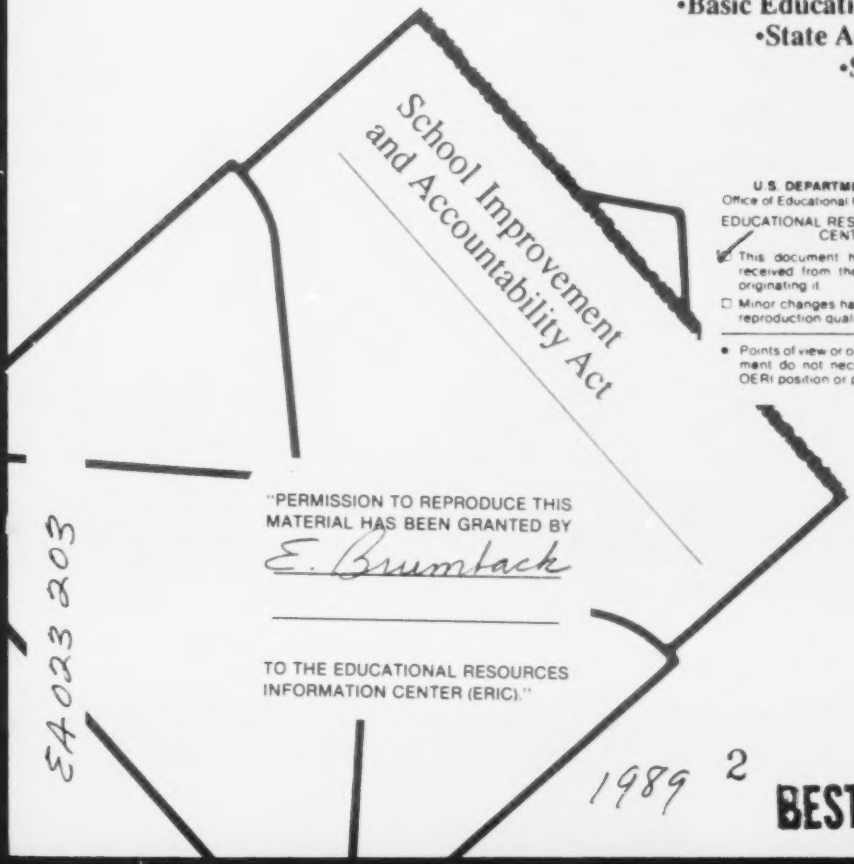
NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

An Invitation to School Improvement in North Carolina

Especially for Teachers: THE CONNECTION

- Basic Education Program
- State Accreditation
- Senate Bill 2



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Especially for Teachers:

THE CONNECTION

North Carolina is in the midst of a major program of education reform, a reform with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement. Leaders in this state began the reform efforts with the passage of the Basic Education Program in 1985. A primary component of that program was a new system of state accreditation designed to monitor the BEP. The reform movement continues with the School Improvement and Accountability Act, Senate Bill 2, approved in 1989.

These important programs have many facets. At first glance, the three efforts may seem unrelated or contradictory. In fact, state accreditation, the BEP and Senate Bill 2 complement and depend on each other for success. In one sense, this makes for a perfect connection. North Carolina's ultimate goal in the education reform effort is improvement of all schools to better meet the needs of students.

Especially for Teachers: THE CONNECTION continues a series of booklets focusing on the 1989 reform effort, Senate Bill 2. It is designed to answer questions about the relationship of accreditation and the Basic Education Program to the School Improvement and Accountability Act.

Bob Etheridge
State Superintendent

Dr. Sammie Campbell Parrish
Assistant State Superintendent,
Program Services

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THE CONNECTION

Basic Education Program

The Basic Education Program describes what is to be taught in North Carolina schools and what resources are needed to carry out this instructional program. It is an eight-year plan, approved in 1985 and scheduled for full implementation by 1993.

Accreditation

State accreditation was revised in 1988-89 and made mandatory for local school systems. It is a way of measuring the outcomes of the Basic Education Program and how well students are performing. Accreditation includes two types of standards, performance and opportunity.

Senate Bill 2

The School Improvement and Accountability Act, Senate Bill 2, gives local teachers and administrators the authority to make decisions about how to use the resources provided by the state through the Basic Education Program and other allotments. It gives local school systems the impetus for improving beyond the accreditation standards and says to them that if they are willing to be held accountable for improving student outcomes, the state will take more of a "hands off" posture with regards to how schools operate at the local level.

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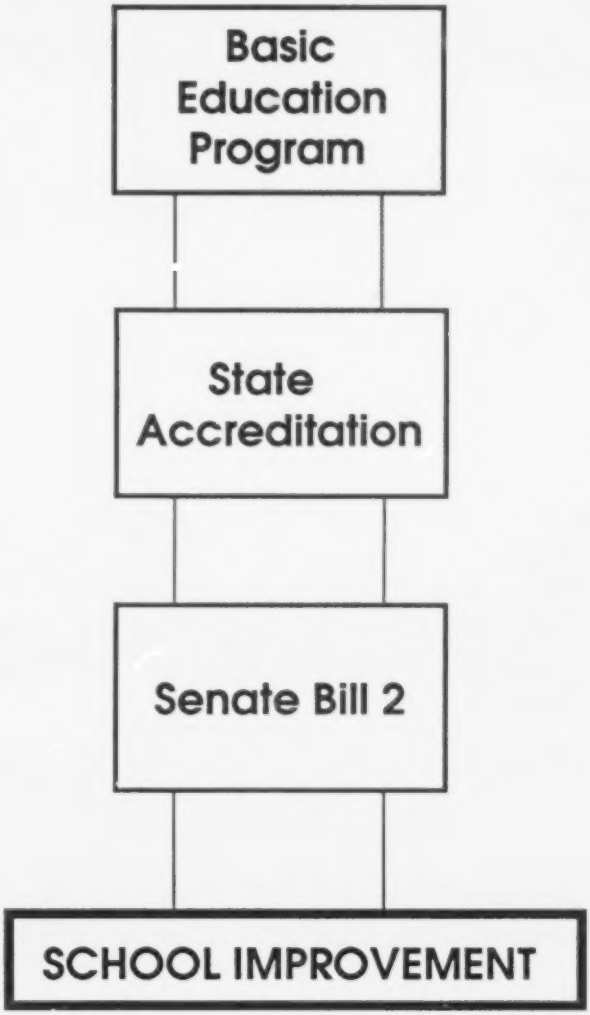

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BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

Purpose & Background

The Basic Education Program spells out the educational program that will be available to every student in North Carolina. The BEP recognizes the unequal distribution of wealth with the impact that fact has on course offerings. The BEP allows poorer counties to expand the curriculum in all schools. North Carolina's General Assembly approved this landmark legislation in 1985. One of its most vocal advocates was State Superintendent Bob Etheridge who, at that time, was a member of the General Assembly. Etheridge said the Basic Education Program "is the most comprehensive and significant change affecting North Carolina's public schools since the state took over the job of paying teacher salaries during the Great Depression."

The BEP does not describe an ideal education program. Rather, it attempts to describe a program of instruction which is fundamentally complete and which would give students a thorough grounding in the arts, communication skills, media and computer skills, second languages, healthful living, mathematics, science, social studies and vocational education and the services required to support these programs. North Carolina's Standard Course of Study and Teacher Handbook outline what is taught in each

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grade and course.

Once fully implemented in 1993, the BEP will offer students up-to-date textbooks, smaller classes, adequate libraries and the opportunity to learn a second language. The program also includes support services, such as guidance and psychological services; promotion standards; special programs, such as in-school suspension and compensatory education; programs for exceptional children; equipment and material needs; staffing ratios; staff development; and facilities standards.

The state is paying for the BEP, at an estimated cost of $800 million over the eight years. By 1993, the BEP will have resulted in the addition of more than 11,000 new teachers; 6,500 teacher assistants; 3,500 instructional support personnel (nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists and media specialists); 2,304 clerks and secretaries; 361 assistant principals; 264 assistant and associate superintendents; 132 vocational education teachers; 110 supervi-

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BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAM

sors; 895 in-school suspension teachers, dropout prevention and/or job placement specialists; and 100 finance officers. Altogether, the BEP will add 25,014 new teachers, support personnel and administrators.

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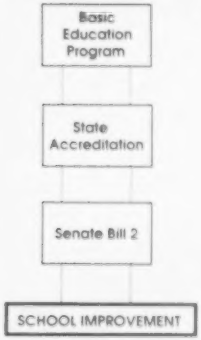

The Basic Education Program outlines what is to be taught in North Carolina schools and the wide variety of services and resources needed to carry out this program. The state's accreditation program was designed to monitor BEP implementation in local school systems. Senate Bill 2 gives local teachers and administrators the flexibility they need to carry out the instructional and support parts of the BEP to best meet the unique needs in local schools.

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ACCREDITATION

Purpose & Background

Accreditation in North Carolina has undergone dramatic changes since its inception in 1925 as a voluntary program. The most dramatic of these changes came during 1988 when the State Board of Education approved a new state accreditation program which is no longer voluntary, and which provides, for the first time in the history of this state, that accreditation will be awarded on the basis of how well students have learned, not just on whether or not certain opportunities or programs were provided in the school system.

This significant shift from assessing only inputs to assessing both inputs and outputs parallels a national movement to measure the quality of education by its product--student learning.

The new accreditation program, contained in the ***North Carolina Program of Accreditation Manual for Public School Units*** (1988), is the result of a mandate from the General Assembly, following the enactment of the BEP, that an accreditation program be developed to monitor its implementation and success.

ACCREDITATION

Student test scores, the percentage of dropouts, students enrolled in advanced courses and the number of students in the Scholars Program are all items that may be used to show how well a school system is progressing under the Basic Education Program.

State accreditation is based on performance and opportunity standards. The performance standards are those measured by student test scores and similar information. An example of a performance standard is: the average of median California Achievement Test scores for the most recent three years is expected to be above the 40th percentile in each school system.

Opportunity standards reflect whether local school systems provide the programs and staff outlined in the Basic Education Program. These standards address course offerings and aspects of the instructional environment deemed critical in elementary and secondary education. Further, the standards address the provision of resources necessary for effective program implementation--funding, scheduling, personnel, facilities, equipment, materials and supplies. For example, the standards requiring second language instruction in compliance with the BEP ensure that all students have the opportunity for second language study, but it does not directly address how thoroughly students learn the second language.

Mandatory accreditation is designed to monitor the

THE CONNECTION

ACCREDITATION

Basic Education Program. It monitors the BEP by assessing both the opportunities which students have had to learn and how well they have learned through performance and opportunity standards. Senate Bill 2 states, however, that systems that participate in the Performance-Based Accountability Program of Senate Bill 2 will be subject to the performance standards but not the opportunity standards of accreditation.

For school systems that participate in Senate Bill 2, the accreditation process will be significantly streamlined and will entail only an assessment of whether or not the system meets 75 percent of the performance standards of accreditation. Because this information will already be discernible from reviewing the goal statements in the Senate Bill 2 plan, little else in the way of an accreditation process will be required.

The important point to remember in understanding the difference between accreditation standards and Senate Bill 2 goals is that accreditation performance standards are set by the State Board of Education and all school systems must eventually meet them to be accredited. Senate Bill 2 goals, with their accompanying annual milestones, are set at the local level with local staff determining how much progress can be made in a given time period. The goal, of course, is to eventually reach accreditation standards and beyond.

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SENATE BILL 2

Purpose & Background

The goal of Senate Bill 2, the School Improvement and Accountability Act, is to improve student performance by providing flexibility and accountability. A major focus of Senate Bill 2 is the Performance-Based Accountability Program which includes development of a local school system improvement plan based on individual school plans. Senate Bill 2 also provides for a differentiated pay plan, testing improvements and a statewide report card.

Senate Bill 2 was developed because legislators, government and community leaders and school officials believe that more decisions about the operation of schools should be made at the local school level. State Superintendent Bob Etheridge believes strongly that student achievement is more likely to improve when most decisions about instruction are made at the level closest to the student. He is also committed to implementing Senate Bill 2 with a minimum of regulations.

School systems were issued an invitation to participate

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in Senate Bill 2 in the fall of 1989. All 134 school systems accepted this invitation by expressing their intent to participate.

By law, there must be teacher involvement in development of local school improvement plans under the Performance-Based Accountability Program. The local plans must include three- to five-year student performance goals and annual milestones to measure progress in meeting those goals. School systems can submit requests for waivers to state laws, regulations or policies that might prohibit the system from meeting its student performance goals if they can describe how such a waiver will help in meeting the goals. March 1 is the date local school system plans are due in to the Department of Public Instruction with a late submission date of April 15.

A determination will be made whether a school system can continue in the Performance-Based Accountability Program. Those that have made satisfactory progress by attaining 75 percent of their milestones may continue. Those that have not, may continue provided they receive technical assistance.

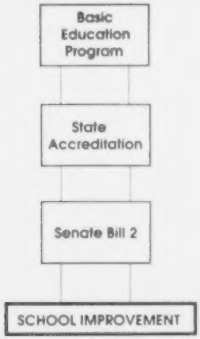
Differentiated pay plans are another important part of Senate Bill 2. Certified personnel in local systems vote on including differentiated pay in their school improvement plan. School systems must participate in the Performance-Based Accountability Program to have differentiated pay. School systems must design one comprehensive differentiated pay plan for review

SENATE BILL 2

and vote. Various individual school options may be included as a part of the single comprehensive plan. Differentiated pay bonuses are paid for one year and do not affect local supplements or cost of living increases.

Local school improvement plans will be reviewed by Department of Public Instruction personnel and submitted for approval to the State Superintendent, with final decisions on waivers being made by the State Board of Education.

THE CONNECTION



Senate Bill 2 gives local school systems the flexibility and authority to make important decisions about how to use resources provided by the Basic Education Program in offering the best education for students. In order to receive the increased flexibility, local school systems must commit to school improvement. Systems are expected to analyze their unique local circumstances and their current student performance on the agreed upon indicators and set targets for improving student performance. While the indicators or measures used in Senate Bill 2 are almost identical to the performance measures in accreditation, there is one major differ-

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ence. To be accredited, a local school system is expected to perform at a specified level as defined in the state accreditation manual. Under Senate Bill 2, local systems are free to set their own locally determined targets for each indicator so long as they are making progress toward accreditation standards or have already attained them.

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(Based on guidelines and procedures adopted by the State Board of Education)

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Q

Now that we have Senate Bill 2, is the BEP still a priority?

A

By all means — the two pieces of legislation serve quite different functions. The BEP describes what is to be taught, and a wide range of services which must be available to all students, while Senate Bill 2 provides flexibility to use resources in creative ways. In addition, through its goals and milestones, Senate Bill 2 will provide one way to assess how much students are benefiting from the BEP, once its various provisions are in place for a period of time.

Further, Senate Bill 2 without the program and resources provided through the BEP would be largely ineffective as local systems would have flexibility without resources and without an agreement about what North Carolina's children should learn.

Q

Why are the indicators used in Senate Bill 2 almost identical to those in state accreditation? Doesn't this cause the two programs to be easily confused?

A

For years, local systems have pleaded for coordination of efforts and programs from the state level. Senate Bill 2 specifically states that the State Board of Education is required to adopt a set of indicators or ways to measure school improvement. Because such measures had just recently been developed and agreed upon for measuring student performance under accreditation, it didn't seem prudent to begin the same process again from scratch, with the possible outcome being a completely different set of

indicators for which locals would be responsible for addressing.

Further, the number of specific student outcome measures currently available is rather limited. Our challenge will be to develop additional and more effective indicators of student learning as we gain experience with Senate Bill 2 and accreditation. Teachers, local school administrators and central office specialists are encouraged to experiment with other measures. These may be added to a system's improvement plan.

Q

If a local school system decided not to participate in Senate Bill 2, would teachers and principals still be responsible for improving student outcomes?

A

Yes. Student performance outcomes came to the forefront as a part of the new state accreditation process designed to monitor the BEP. Therefore, the emphasis on student performance actually preceded Senate Bill 2. As a result of Senate Bill 2, however, those local systems that already meet or nearly meet accreditation standards are encouraged and motivated to move beyond the standards, recognizing that any standard set which all must meet, regardless of circumstance, has to be reasonable and attainable by all. For those school systems still working to reach accreditation, Senate Bill 2 allows them to set their own local targets or goals leading to achievement of accreditation standards.

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Q

Some elementary teachers are concerned about the time requirements of the BEP, feeling that there are not enough hours in the day to implement fully the requirements of the expanded program. Will Senate Bill 2 provide more flexibility in this regard?

A

Yes. But teachers and principals may be surprised to find that they have had far more flexibility than they have used in this regard, even before the passage of Senate Bill 2. We have found that pull-out programs and rigid time blocks have been established in many schools and systems when there are no BEP requirements to do so. The intent of BEP was that more objectives and activities of the elementary program would be integrated and that schedules involving specialists would be coordinated with classroom teachers. In some cases, elementary teachers would team with specialists accomplishing their objectives for more than one subject area during the same lesson.

Additionally, it should be pointed out that teachers were already responsible for teaching most subjects in the BEP expansion program prior to passage of the BEP. The BEP simply provided the specialized resources to implement these programs more systematically, appropriately and effectively across the entire state.

Q

Why does Senate Bill 2 not require opportunity indicators as well as performance indicators? If this is important in accreditation, would it not also be important under Senate Bill 2?

A

Providing adequate opportunities for learning such as allotted time, materials, pupil-teacher ratio, certified staff, instructional practices, etc., are important indeed. They are the factors or inputs that we have long believed contribute to student achievement.

Research supports allowing those closest to students to make more decisions about how to organize and utilize resources for teaching and learning. In short, Senate Bill 2 implies that we are interested in results, teaching and managing for results, not in dictating a "how-to" process. Naturally, as we discover successful and dramatic results, we will want to inquire about input specifics so that they can be shared with others.

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